



NORTHERN BITES

BY NIKI HUUS

It's Picnic Time

To my mind, a picnic is like the banjo. I'm thinking of Steve Martin's famous comedy bit where he demonstrates on his instrument that one cannot be depressed, showing the impossibility of gloom and destruction lyrics while plucking out a jaunty tune. Just say "Let's go on a picnic!" and I'm filled with the same foot-tapping, bouncy spirit of the banjo and ready for an adventure. In the battle against Covid-19, we're all in need of some simple and uplifting fun and picnicking is the new trend.

While you can get as elaborate as you please when packing a picnic, you can also simplify things to be low-stress and accommodate spontaneity while still offering a surprising treat. Simple swap outs of sandwich components, like upgrading to an artisan bread, can make the usual something special. Adding a kicky condiment

is my favorite trick and can be accomplished in 15 minutes or less. To some deli roast beef, try adding a crusty roll and whip up a mayo based on the classic sauce for a wow factor. To make Mayo Béarnaise, bring ½ C minced shallot, 3Tbsp chopped fresh tarragon (1 dried), 1/3 C white wine, 3 Tbsp lemon juice to a boil and cook until reduced to a spoonful of liquid remaining, about 5 minutes. Cool and whisk into 1C mayonnaise. Easy and delectable, and here's four more suggestions. For a Mexican mayo, whisk together 1C mayo, ¼ C crumbled bacon, 1Tbsp pickle relish, 1tsp agave (or honey), 1-2 minced, canned chipotle chilies in adobo and some salt & pepper. Try spreading a wrap with the mayo, leaving a border, then layer on slices of cheese (I like a combo of American and Pepper Jack) and shredded iceberg lettuce. Roll up, tucking ends in, and bias



and mix in enough mayo to bind. For the sandwich, I like a crusty, dark raisin bread, slices of deli pork (or grilled game meat or fowl) and a scoop of this slaw.

There are so many ways you can experiment to come up with personal variations. Then hit the road and find your own piece of shaded grass or bend in the river. Novel, homemade tastes wait inside your picnic basket like the surprise inside a Cracker Jacks box. It's time for a simple feast, fresh air, and taking in the surroundings. It's time for a picnic and a song in your heart, strumming banjos and all.

Pan Bagnat: Make filling with two 4.5 oz cans of good white tuna in oil drained, 1/3C each chopped ripe tomato & roasted red pepper, ¼ C diced red onion, a grated garlic clove and some torn basil leaves. Sprinkle with salt & pepper and a tablespoon or two each of red wine vinegar & olive oil, gently mix and let marinate 10 minutes. For sandwich, cut a crusty baguette in half lengthwise and remove much of soft middle to make shell. Spread olive mayo on one side, add mix to other and top with 2 sliced hard-boiled eggs sprinkled with salt & pepper. Wrap together and press with weight an hour or so for juice to flavor bread.

Fattoush Pockets: Mix 2Tbsp cider vinegar and ½ tsp salt, toss in 1C red seedless grapes (or cherry tomatoes), halved, and let pickle 10 minutes. Meanwhile, cut ½ C each thinly sliced Romaine; peeled, seeded, diced cucumber; diced red bell pepper; ¼ C chopped red onion; ¼ C mint; ¼ C purslane or parsley and 1 grated clove of garlic. Drain grapes, add to veg, and save pickle for dressing. Combine liquid with 2 Tbsp olive oil, whisking in 1tsp cumin, 1tsp pomegranate molasses or honey; 1 tsp pepper & ½ tsp salt. Mix dressing into salad. For pocket, cut pita bread in half, spread bottom inside with humus, top with Phoenician mayo, then pile in flavorful fattoush.

cut it in half. For a French touch, try my Aillade mayo by processing ½ C walnuts and 3 chopped garlic cloves into a paste. Add salt & pepper, then steam in 2Tbsp oil (half walnut oil/olive oil is nice). Pulse to combine with 1C mayonnaise and 1C chopped parsley. This is terrific with deli roast turkey on a good sourdough bread. Mayo Nicoise is simply 1C mayo to which ½ C chopped Nicoise (black) olives, optional 1Tbsp chopped capers, ¼ tsp garlic powder and a bit of thyme have been added. I recently used this on a pan bagnat revamped into a deconstructed Salad Nicoise. Then there's Phoenician mayo, exotic flavors but simple to make, which

requires adding ¼ C yogurt, 1Tbsp harissa, 1 tsp sumac (or squeeze of lemon), salt & pepper to 1C of mayo. This can really perk up hummus or a vegetable salad. My final sandwich addition is a slaw and a north country variation on southern pulled pork topped with cole slaw on a bun. For my Hunter's Slaw, cut 5-7 slices of bacon into ½ inch pieces and fry in butter with ½ C sliced onion and a couple of crushed juniper berries until just cooked. Add ½ C each white wine & stock and reduce by half, about 8 minutes. Remove berries, add 1 Tbsp butter, 4C thinly sliced Savoy cabbage and cook until softened, about 10 minutes. Season with salt & pepper, cool, drain liquid

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U.S. Grant's Last Days on Mount McGregor

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overlooking the farmlands and woods of rural Saratoga County.

It was for these views that a hotel and railway were built here in the 1870s, in the hope that the bracing air and rustic setting could compete with the mineral spas, horse racing

and gambling to be found in Saratoga Springs.

The railroad, which brought Grant to the cottage and carried his remains home, was built to serve both a sanitarium and the Hotel Balmoral, which burned in 1897.

The sanitarium became a New York State prison. Since closing a few years ago, the complex is vacant

and is for sale by the state.

Grant's standing as a general and as a president has risen in recent years, largely as the result of a wave of new biographies (while that of his nemesis, Robert E. Lee, has fallen.)

He remains, however, a controversial figure.

A historian who argues that Grant used his memoirs to tarnish the reputation of subordinate officers to make himself look better will speak at the Ticonderoga Historical Society's Hancock House this week.

Ticonderoga summer resident Frank Varney, author of "General Grant and the Rewriting of History: How the Destruction of General William S. Rosecrans Influenced Our Understanding of the Civil War," will present "One Man's Impact: U.S. Grant and Our Memory of the Civil War" on Friday, July 31 at 7 p.m.

A Ticonderoga native, Varney earned his Ph.D. from Cornell University. He teaches U.S. and classical history at Dickinson State University of North Dakota.

The program will be held outdoors and will be cancelled in the event of rain. Attendance is limited to 25 people and reservations are required. To reserve a spot, call the Hancock House at 518-585-7868.

For information about Grant Cottage and to book a tour, call the site at 518 587-8277.

To reach the Grant Cottage from Lake George, take I-87 south to Exit 16. From Exit 16, head west on Route 9. Go through the intersection, take the first right and follow Grant Cottage signs to the gate.

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